SUDAN CONFLICT OBSERVATORY

EVIDENCE CONSISTENT WITH ALLEGED BODY DISPOSAL IN EL-GENEINA

REPORT 010 | 14 SEPTEMBER 2023

Satellite data ©2023 Maxar Technologies, Planet Labs PBC. Icons sourced royalty free from the Noun Project.

All imagery and data analysis ©2023 Humanitarian Research Lab at Yale School of Public Health, PlanetScape Ai LLC.

This report was produced as part of the Sudan Conflict Observatory with the support of the Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations, United States Department of State. This report does not represent the views of the United States Government. Learn more at <u>Sudan.ConflictObservatory.org</u>.

The Faculty Director of the Humanitarian Research Lab (HRL) at Yale is Dr. Kaveh Khoshnood. Report production was overseen by Nathaniel Raymond, HRL Executive Director, and managed by Caitlin Howarth, HRL Conflict Observatory Director. Analysis was conducted by the Humanitarian Research Lab.

CITATION | Howarth, Caitlin N., Kaveh Khoshnood, Nathaniel A. Raymond, et al. "Evidence consistent with alleged body disposal in El-Geneina." Report 010. 14 September 2023, Sudan Conflict Observatory: Washington, DC. Available at https://sudan.conflictobservatory.org.

METHODOLOGY

Yale school of public health

Humanitarian Research Lab

The Yale Humanitarian Research Lab's data fusion methodologies combine remote sensing analysis with open-source data to assess and geolocate events. Yale HRL uses remote sensing data including moderate and very high resolution (VHR) satellite imagery, NASA thermal detection data, as well as open-source social media, local news reporting, multimedia, and other verified reports. When necessary, sources are redacted for protection purposes; a redacted source list is available to authorized users.

The conflict in Sudan is marked by a lack of data generally. This includes limited remote sensing data including moderate and VHR satellite imagery and open-source data, including social media. The lack of open-source multimedia may be attributed partially to the widespread power and telecommunications blackouts across the region. This means that (a) many events are unreported or under-reported, and (b) where reports of events exist there may not be sufficient data at this time to corroborate or assess alleged events.

Terms

- NASA FIRMS | NASA Fire Information for Resource Management System
- Reported | Based on credible, verified media reporting

KEY FINDINGS

- Yale HRL finds evidence of alleged disposal of light-toned objects consistent with body bags containing human remains at a site reported to be a possible mass grave. The light-toned objects are visible as of 12 August 2023 with at least four light-toned objects measuring between 1.8-meters and 2.2-meters observed on the outer rim of the purported water catchments.
- These findings come after the widespread and credible reports that the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and aligned forces committed alleged atrocities, including massacres, against civilians in El-Geneina. This report does not identify the people or organizations responsible for the presence of these objects consistent with alleged body disposal.
- RSF's systematic attacks targeted ethnic violence against non-Arab communities, including the Masalit and Burgo tribes in West Darfur.
- Yale HRL imagery analysts have only identified and analyzed a limited amount of the reported 30 mass grave sites.

Basis of the Assessment

- Yale HRL's assessment that this location has light-toned objects consistent with human remains enclosed within a body bag corroborates a report from Sky News and Center for Advanced Defense Studies (C4ADS) claims that this is a site of where decomposed bodies were reportedly dumped. This location has additional indicators which are consistent with other witness reports of body disposal in El-Geneina. Witnesses have reported that bodies have been disposed of in water catchments in proximity to the main highway connecting El-Geneina to Chad. Local actors report that this area is under the control of the RSF and that there are multiple credible reports of as many as 30 different mass grave sites in El-Geneina according to CNN and others.
- This report does not present evidence that enables attribution for the apparent activity this report documents.
- Imagery collected from before the start of the rainy season and the reports
 of atrocities, when water catchments were not full, does not show the
 presence of these observable objects.
- Those objects appear in imagery captured on 12 August 2023 and in imagery captured on 6 September 2023 as a result of what appears to be water retreating in those catchments.

- Three measurements in different geospatial platforms indicate that the objects measure between 1.8 to 2.2 meters in length (6 to 7 feet). The objects also appear to be light-toned in color which is consistent with standard white rubberized body bags used by the Red Cross/Red Crescent.
- Open-source reports includes photos of the standard white rubberized Red Cross/Red Crescent body bags being used in Darfur. Yale HRL has confirmed that Sudanese Red Crescent Society (SRCS) activities, including body disposal, took place in El-Geneina at the end of June 2023.
- In addition to the color, the common length and shape of these objects would be consistent with a body bag containing human remains.
- Those water catchments are within 400 meters to the main road that connects El Geneina and Chad, and approximately within 1000 meters from the outskirts of El-Geneina city.
- Yale HRL has confirmed that the body bags that would be consistent with these objects were deployed by SRCS in West Darfur during this time.

Violence in El-Geneina

The Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and aligned militias allegedly attacked and massacred civilians in and around El-Geneina and are reported to have committed additional atrocities against the civilian populations in and around the city in early June of 2023. These atrocities mirror a pattern of targeted ethnic violence against non-Arab populations, the majority of which are from the Masalit and the Burgo tribes. United Nations (UN) Human Rights Commissioner Volker Türk, in a statement to the UN Human Rights Council on 12 September 2023, described these attacks as ethnically motivated attacks perpetrated by the RSF and allied Arab militia.

Impact of Violence in El-Geneina

As the violence intensified in early June 2023, the late Governor of West Darfur Khamis Akbar spoke of the deteriorating human security situation in El-Geneina in an AlHadath interview. Shortly after his interview on 14 June 2023, the governor was allegedly kidnapped and extrajudicially killed by the RSF. RSF then besieged El-Geneina with increased levels of violence resulting in at least 1,100 civilians massacred by 15 June 2023. Vi Survivor testimonies, from civilians who fled to the Adre border town recounted that between 15 and 17 June 2023 non-Arab civilians of El-Geneina were targeted and killed by

- i. https://www.state.gov/investigations-and-prosecutions-of-atrocities-in-darfur/#:~:text=The%20United%20States%20condemns%20in,as%20reported%20by%20credible%20sour ces., archived at https://perma.cc/RX6M-RJUN; https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2023/09/sudan-turk-says-conflict-must-stop-it-too-late-pull-country-back archived at https://perma.cc/2UFV-XQDQ
- ii. https://www.state.gov/condemning-atrocities-in-darfur/, archived at https://perma.cc/RW6W-KMQU; https://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/relatives-of-masalit-sultan-killed-in-renewed-attacks-on-west-darfur-capital, archived at https://perma.cc/4257-NNZV
- iii. https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2023/09/sudan-turk-says-conflict-must-stop-it-too-late-pull-country-back archived at https://perma.cc/2UFV-XQDQ
- iv. https://twitter.com/AlHadath/status/1669100627119538179?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweete mbed%7Ctwterm%5E1669100627119538179%7Ctwgr%5E223319b980ab905ead5d985e7224249d96013d 7d%7Ctwcon%5Es1_&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.alarabiya.net%2Farab-and-world%2Fsudan%2F2023%2F06%2F15%2FD8B4D8A7D987D8AF-D8A2D8AED8B1-D8B8D987D988D8B1-D984D988D8A7D984D98A-D8BAD8B1D8A8-D8AFD8A7D8B1D981D98D82D8ABD981-D982D8ABD984-D8A7D8A7D8A7D8B7D8A7D981D987-D988D982D8AD984D987, archived at https://perma.cc/G52B-YZ7G
- v. https://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/sudanese-intl-community-condemn-killing-of-west-darfur-governor-fingers-pointed-at-rsf, archived at https://perma.cc/7YUC-XX6R

RSF and allied militias. VII Survivors of the massacres described that the RSF systematically attacked civilians across El-Geneina. Some specific locations noted were near the El-Geneina Teaching Hospital, by a Sudanese military base in Ardmata, as well as civilians being shot at in the Wadi Kaja river as civilians were attempting to cross over and flee. VIII

The United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner (OHCHR) reported on 13 July 2023 that the victims of violence who were buried in the mass graves were killed by RSF and their allied militia around 13-21 June in El-Geneina's Al-Madaress and Al-Jamerek districts. As civilians attempted to flee from the RSF, the RSF and aligned militias systematically shot civilians along the main road leading towards Chad. On 20 June 2023, AlHadath documented scenes in El-Geneina with corpses dispersed on the streets. Yale HRL imagery analysts assessed multimedia content from AlHadath and geolocated the bodies to El-Geneina and provided satellite imagery corroboration of the suspected location. The Darfur Bar Association also reported on 21 June 2023 that corpses remained scattered on the streets, inside homes and in various public facilities in El-Geneina. CNN corroborated and visually confirmed the additional presence of corpses lying in the streets in the Wadi Kaji area.

- vi. https://www.newarab.com/news/sudan-army-accuses-rsf-after-governor-west-darfur-killed, archived at https://perma.cc/HX49-HCLP
- vii. https://www.cnn.com/2023/08/16/africa/darfur-sudan-geneina-massacre-account-cmd-intl/index.html archived at https://perma.cc/KHY6-43K4
- viii. https://www.cnn.com/2023/08/16/africa/darfur-sudan-geneina-massacre-account-cmd-intl/index.html archived at https://perma.cc/KHY6-43K4
- ix. https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/07/sudan-least-87-buried-mass-grave-darfur-rapid-support-forces-deny
 - victims#:~:text=According%20to%20credible%20information%20gathered,the%20Governor%20of%20Wes t%20Darfur%2C, archived at https://perma.cc/N2N3-RG3H
- x. https://twitter.com/AlHadath/status/1671241507813093377, archived at https://perma.cc/DDW7-Z7CR
- xi. https://hub.conflictobservatory.org/portal/sharing/rest/content/items/e7ef463ce2e94da682a985ea601e21c9 /data archived at https://perma.cc/BL7D-HT47
- xii. https://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/darfur-lawyers-bodies-scattered-across-el-geneina, archived at https://perma.cc/FP5R-QAPW
- xiii. https://www.cnn.com/2023/08/16/africa/darfur-sudan-geneina-massacre-account-cmd-intl/index.html, archived at https://perma.cc/KHY6-43K4

Violence in El-Geneina

Mass burials of civilians across El-Geneina

The light toned objects visible in satellite imagery at what Yale HRL has assessed to be a potential dumping site at the reported mass grave site are consistent with the standard white rubberized Red Cross/Red Crescent body bags that the SRCS has used in Sudan. The SRCS volunteers are trained and tasked to help recover, bury and preserve the identity of the corpses in Sudan prior to and during the conflict.xiv During the first two months of the conflict, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) donated over 100 body bags, plastic sheets, and personal protective equipment (gloves, masks, gowns, overalls, sanitizer, and fuel) to the SRCS. xv Multimedia content circulated online, as seen below, in early May and early June of 2023 showed that the SRCS conducted sanitary cleanup in Khartoum, North Darfur, West Darfur, and South Darfur.xvi



Figure 1: Sudanese Red Crescent Society volunteers wearing personal protective equipment utilizing body bags to conduct sanitary cleanup in Sudan.xvii

xiv. https://www.icrc.org/en/document/sudan-essential-services-breaking-point-after-two-months-fighting, archived at https://perma.cc/3ELG-R9UM

xv. https://www.icrc.org/en/document/sudan-essential-services-breaking-point-after-two-months-fighting, archived at https://perma.cc/3ELG-R9UM

xvi. https://twitter.com/SRCS_SD/status/1664492974749655042, archived at https://archive.ph/0CXr0; https://twitter.com/SudanPlusNews/status/1662754257785831424, archived at https://archive.ph/tPtLq; https://twitter.com/ICRC_Sudan/status/1656602346309267458?s=20, archived at https://archive.ph/hAvem

Violence in El-Geneina

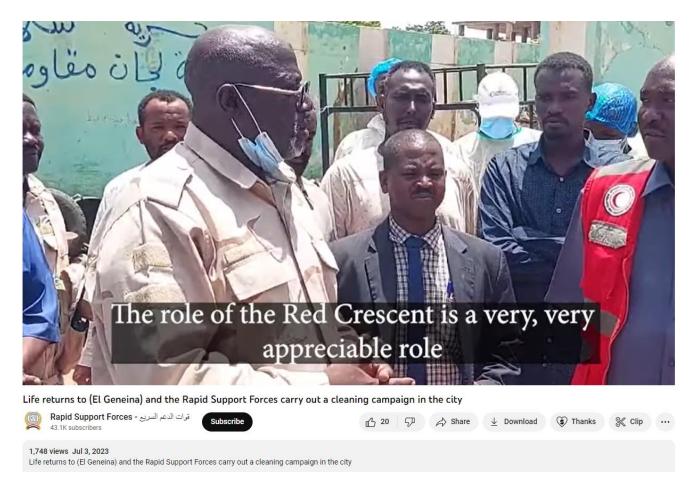


Figure 2: Photo snippet from RSF's cleaning campaign video published on YouTube on 3 July 2023.xviii

Community leaders in West Darfur accused the RSF of allegedly forcing the Red Crescent workers into sanitary cleanup and body disposal in El-Geneina. RSF released a propaganda video on 3 July 2023 about the cleaning campaign in El-Geneina.

The video that the RSF circulated online showed evidence of workers engaged in body disposal operations wearing the SRCS aprons.xix Standard red cross-red crescent body bags measure approximately 2.2 meters by 1.2 meters.xx

- xviii. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZJtWBlzB6qA&t=323s, archived at https://perma.cc/W2XC-W9C8
- xix. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZJtWBlzB6qA&t=323s, archived at https://perma.cc/W2XC-W9C8; https://www.dabangasudan.org/ar/all-news/article/%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%ac%d9%86%d9%8a%d9%86%d8%a9-%d9%85%d9%82%d8%a7%d8%a8%d8%b1-%d8%ac%d9%85%d8%a7%d8%b9%d9%8a%d8%a9-%d8%b3%d8%b1%d9%8a%d8%a9-%d9%88%d8%ac%d8%ab-%d8%b9%d9%84%d9%89-%d8%a7%d8%b3, archived at https://perma.cc/B3S4-9RV6
- xx. https://itemscatalogue.redcross.int/wash--6/sanitation--22/forensic-41/body-bag--WSANBODB.aspx archived at https://perma.cc/8DWE-S3FS?type=image

Violence in El-Geneina

West Darfur Community leaders announced, in a press conference on 12 August 2023, that there were at least 30 mass graves containing at least a thousand bodies as a result of the attacks on El-Geneina.** The UN had reported on 13 July 2023, that 87 people were buried in mass graves right outside of El Geneina on the 20th and 21st of June 2023 in an area called the Red Soil near the site that Yale HRL assesses in this report.** The bodies of the victims belonged to civilians from the Masalit communities.** The UN reported on 14 September 2023 that they had credible reports of at least 13 mass graves sites in El-Geneina. xxiv Yale HRL is unable at this time to confirm whether the site in question is the same site reported on by the UN on 13 July 2023 owing to limitations of available data.

The RSF reportedly forced a clean-up operation that collected bodies, the majority of which are from Masalit and Burgo tribes, after bodies had been lying in the streets for days and weeks.** According to a humanitarian volunteer eyewitness, the bodies of people killed in the massacre were dumped into the water catchment around El-Geneina. The water levels at these sites rapidly change due to seasonal rainfall and are often higher during the rainy season.** Various news reporting and satellite imagery analyzed by Yale HRL identified the suspected location of the reported mass grave sites

just north of the main road connecting El-Geneina to eastern Chad, as previously reported by Sky News.xxvii

n a televised news interview with Al-Jazeera and Alaraby TV circulated on 04 September 2023, the Sultan of the Masalit tribe in El-Geneina, Sa'ad Bahreldin, stated that the civilian death toll in El-Geneina has reached more than 3000 since the start of the conflict and holds the RSF responsible for the killing of thousands of citizens in the city of El-Geneina.**** The Sultan also reported that the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) did not step out of their army command in El-Geneina to protect civilians from the killings and other atrocities perpetrated by RSF and allied militias.*** Although the Sultan managed to flee and seek refuge in Chad, the RSF and allied militias killed other members of his family and of the Sultan's council. A brother of the Sultan, Amir Tarig, was among the 17 killed by the RSF on 11 June 2023, during the RSF assault on El Geneina.***

- xxi. https://www.dabangasudan.org/ar/all-news/article/%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%ac%d9%86%d9%8a%d9%86%d8%a9-%d9%85%d9%82%d8%a7%d8%a8%d8%b1-%d8%ab3%d8%b1%d9%8a%d8%a9-%d9%88%d8%ac%d8%ab4%8ab-%d8%b9%d9%84%d9%89-%d8%ab7%d8%b3, archived at https://perma.cc/B3S4-9RV6
- xxii. https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/07/1138647, archived at https://perma.cc/3L2U-QDET
- xxiii. https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/07/1138647, archived at https://perma.cc/3L2U-QDET
- xxiv. https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/credible-reports-least-13-mass-graves-darfurs-el-geneina-surrounding-areas-un-2023-09-13/ archived at https://perma.cc/K2EH-TG3X
- xxv. https://news.sky.com/story/i-buried-my-sister-54-days-after-she-was-killed-mass-graves-in-west-darfurs-capital-haunt-remaining-residents-12941508 archived at https://perma.cc/X7SQ-6CJH
- xxvi. https://news.sky.com/story/i-buried-my-sister-54-days-after-she-was-killed-mass-graves-in-west-darfurs-capital-haunt-remaining-residents-12941508 archived at https://perma.cc/X7SQ-6CJH

- txvii. https://news.sky.com/story/i-buried-my-sister-54-days-after-she-was-killed-mass-graves-in-west-darfurs-capital-haunt-remaining-residents-12941508 archived at https://perma.cc/X7SQ-6CJH
 - https://www.aljazeeramubasher.net/news/politics/2023/9/4/%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%B7%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%82%D8%A8%D9%8A%D9%84%D8%A9-

%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%AA-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D9%88%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%BA%D8%B1%D8%A8 archived at https://perma.cc/M2VJ-TYEO

xxix. SITREP_03_001

xxviii.

xxx. https://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/relatives-of-masalit-sultan-killed-in-renewed-attacks-on-west-darfur-capital archived at https://perma.cc/N8KY-SF4J

Violence in El-Geneina

RSF besieged El-Geneina using tactics to discriminately kill non-Arab populations, which led to the forcible displacement of in at least 70% of the town's population. Civilians who remain in El-Geneina are faced with a lack of civilian protection. In previous clashes and fighting through 14 September 2023, SAF failed to intervene to protect civilians who were getting attacked in the city. The absence of civilian protection further endangers their livelihood and significantly demonstrates a repeated cycle of events in Darfur similar to that of the genocides in 2003 and 2004.

Current situation in Fl-Geneina

As of 14 September 2023, the situation in El-Geneina is reported as relatively calm owing to the minimal exchanges of fighting between the RSF and SAF. Efforts by the West Darfur Deputy Governor and local community appear to have limited active fighting in an attempt to restore security.**XXXI SAF and RSF, on 02 September 2023, renewed their commitment to stop and refrain from attacks in El-Geneina.**XXXII However, civilians are still subjected to looting and poor treatment by the RSF and allied militias.**XXXIII The probability for chaos to ensue remains highly likely as the situation is still delicate between the two forces raising grave concerns for the safety and security of the civilians that have remained.

Humanitarian access and freedom of movement remains heavily restricted. Reporting on the state of hospital and medical care facilities remains scarce, but as of the end of July 2023 all hospitals were reportedly out of service. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) released a situation report in July 2023 noting the critical situation in West Darfur with civilians fleeing to Chad amid the security concerns and the lack of food and basic necessities in El-Geneina. The particular, food aid was named as the most critical need, with reports of civilians having to reduce daily meals. The Humanitarian needs fail to be met as humanitarian aid convoys have not reached El-Geneina due to the wider security situation in Darfur state. OCHA reported on 7 September 2023 that plans were, however, being developed for a WFP food delivery to the city. The city is unclear whether telecommunication services have been restored in the city, making it difficult for civilians to communicate and report on the situation in the area.

xxxi. https://www.darfur24.com/2023/09/02/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%8A%D8%B4-

%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D8%B9%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%B9-

%D9%8A%D8%AC%D8%AF%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B2%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%87%D9%85%D8%A7/ archived at

https://perma.cc/F49F-KQY3

xxxii. https://www.darfur24.com/2023/09/02/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%8A%D8%B4-

%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D8%B9%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%B9-%D9%8A%D8%AC%D8%AF%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86-

%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B2%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%87%D9%85%D8%A7/ archived at

https://perma.cc/F49F-KQY3

xxxiii. SITREP 03 002

xxxiv. https://twitter.com/AlArabiya/status/1683185919162040320 archived at https://perma.cc/8TDJ-C6AH

xxxv. https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/regional-sudan-response-situation-update-25-july-2023

xxxvi. https://reports.unocha.org/en/country/sudan/, archived at https://perma.cc/7WTG-HS88

xxxvii. https://reports.unocha.org/en/country/sudan/, archived at https://perma.cc/7WTG-HS88

El-Geneina

REPORTED SITE OF ALLEGED BODY DISPOSAL

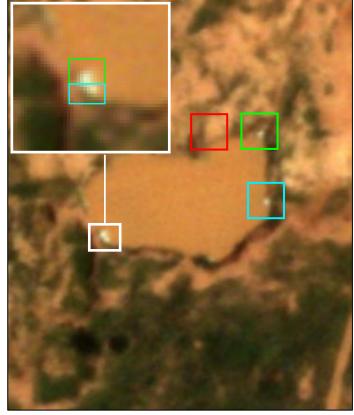
According to analysis of commercial imagery, as water appeared to have retreated from the suspected site between 25 June 2023 and 6 September 2023, at least four light-toned objects measuring between 1.8-meters and 2.2-meters were observed on the outer rim of the purported water wells. Those objects were not visible in imagery taken before the 25 June 2023 imagery, including images during the dry season when the water catchments appear to be empty. These objects are consistent with the standard white rubberized Red Cross/Red Crescent body bags that the Sudanese Red Crescent Society (SRCS) uses in Sudan.







12 August 2023 © 2023 Maxar



06 September 2023 © 2023 Planet Labs PBC

El-Geneina

REPORTED SITE OF ALLEGED BODY DISPOSAL



12 August 2023 © 2023 Maxar

According to analysis of commercial imagery, as water appeared to have retreated from the suspected site between 25 June 2023 and 6 September 2023, at least four light-toned objects measuring between 1.8-meters and 2.2-meters were observed on the outer rim of the purported water wells. Those objects were not visible in imagery taken before the 25 June 2023 imagery, including images during the dry season when the water catchments appear to be empty. These objects are consistent with the standard white rubberized Red Cross/Red Crescent body bags that the Sudanese Red Crescent Society (SRCS) uses in Sudan.



06 September 2023 © 2023 Planet Labs PBC

SUDAN CONFLICT OBSERVATORY

Sudan.ConflictObservatory.org